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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [BE](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIAN MFA FINDS IDEA OF BIG EXPANSION OF AFGHAN ARMY "INTERESTING"

REF: STATE 93225

Classified By: DCM Wayne Bush, reason 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. Summary: Without committing the GOB, Renier Nijskens of the Belgian MFA received reftel demarche, regarding expanding the Afghan National Army (ANA), favorably. He warned that such an increase in manpower must be implemented intelligently so that money spent is not wasted. He said that currently, interest in Afghanistan in Belgium is high. The government's main concern is the political situation, he said, and he expressed doubts about the Karzai government's willingness to curb corruption and incompetence among officials. He was concerned that Pakistan may be creating trouble in Afghanistan, in hopes of gaining territory. Therefore, he said, the allies must make it clear that the current borders will not be changed. The chief of Belgian land forces was quoted in the press as expressing hope that the Belgian's F-16 mission to Kandahar will be a success and that as a result sufficient popular and political support will be generated that Belgium can send a 60- or 70-man training mission to Northern Afghanistan in 2009. End Summary.

¶2. Poloffs delivered reftel demarche seeking support for expansion of the Afghan National Army to Renier Nijskens, Director of the Department of South and East Asia and Oceania at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September 3. Belgium is not a member of the coordination board, but Nijskens said that his government takes the increasingly difficult security situation in Afghanistan seriously and will give due consideration to supporting the Afghan government's request for authority to add troops to the ANA. "Afghanistan is an emergency and we should do as much as we can," he said. The charge d'affaires at the Belgian Embassy in Kabul will likely "sit in the back" of the September 10 Coordination Board meeting, as he has in the past, Nijskens said. Nijskens noted that Defense Minister De Crem was in Afghanistan with the four Belgian F-16's and accompanying troops who arrived in Kandahar on September 2. He said that Belgium would like to see any increase in the ANA take place in an intelligent manner so that money spent on the project is not wasted. He added that the Afghan police need to be strengthened as well, but that corruption in their ranks must be reduced, if it cannot be eliminated.

¶3. Nijskens talked at length about the political situation in Afghanistan, especially in light of approaching parliamentary elections. The Belgian public, media and government are taking a great and increasing interest in what happens in Afghanistan, he said. In the Belgian government and the MFA the focus is on the non-military, political aspects of the problem. He believes that President Karzai is too permissive toward incompetent and corrupt politicians, allowing them to hold on to offices in his government and in the regions. The government must stop shuffling corrupt politicians from region to region, he said. Nijskens said that vetting of candidates is required to keep warlords out

of parliament and permit other more acceptable persons to run. He also urged outside support for protection of human rights and more press freedom, so that the press is allowed to expose wrongdoing. He was concerned by instances of looting of food aid by a regional governor whom President Karzai was unwilling to discipline. This undermines Afghans' confidence in Karzai and his government, Nijskens said. All these ideas will be included in a paper Nijskens is drafting for the MFA's possible use with partners.

¶4. Nijskens also expressed doubt that the Pakistanis are interested in real stability in Afghanistan. He wondered whether the Pakistanis are deliberately encouraging trouble in Afghanistan, because a weak Afghanistan would make it easier for the GOP to claim land beyond its border with the country. He urged that all involved must insist that the current border (the Durand line) be considered untouchable in the same way that colonially-imposed borders in Africa are respected to avoid conflicts. Nijskens said the GOG was disappointed when Paddy Ashdown was not appointed as UNAMA coordinator. He speculated that President Karzai is not interested in having a strong figure in the position, who might reduce Karzai's leverage on the allies.

¶5. Nijskens called attention to an editorial in the Brussels daily De Standaard by Rob van Wijk, a Dutch professor of international relations at the University of Leiden and director of the Hague Institute for Strategic Studies. Van Wijk called on Belgium to show solidarity with its allies and for NATO to stay in Afghanistan to avoid the perception of a defeat. However, van Wijk sees a need for an exit strategy based on decentralizing power in Afghanistan to the

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provinces, with NATO support for developing Afghan public officials, military and police. Fighting on the ground should be left as much as possible to the ANA. De Wijk also envisages a rapid reaction force, stationed outside Afghanistan, to execute "hit and run" operations if an unfriendly regime comes to power.

¶6. Also in De Standaard, General Eddy Testelmans, chief of staff of Belgium's land forces, is quoted as saying that he hopes the mission of the F-16's in Kandahar will be a great success, so that the army will be able to count on the goodwill of Belgian politicians and the Belgian people will be able to accept sending ground troops to Afghanistan. Testelmans reportedly would like to send sixty to seventy military instructors to train Afghan army recruits in the north of Afghanistan, possibly in early 2009. Such a mission would require government approval.

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